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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7963  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1382  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4904  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8466  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6033  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3925  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1887  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000594

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA,S KEYSTONE COPS

REF: A. RANGOON 580  
[1](#)B. 07 RANGOON 1019

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Authorities have released all seven NLD members who were detained prior to Martyr's Day last week, but not before treating them to tea and snacks while in custody. At least two government soldiers were killed in a small skirmish between Burma Army troops and the Arakan Liberation Army near Burma's border with India and Bangladesh. Tuesday Prayer campaigner Naw Ohn Hla was injured in an auto accident and is in the hospital. The regime censored a number of cartoons created for a Cyclone Nargis fundraiser, but did not arrest the artists.

KEYSTONE COPS

[1](#)2. (C) NLD official Win Naing confirmed that on July 20, authorities released seven NLD members, who were arrested immediately before Martyr's Day (reftel A). Another young NLD member who spoke with his recently-released colleagues told us the seven activists were initially picked up by Special Branch officers, but quickly turned over to another police unit known as "Section Four." Our contact said that, once the seven were in custody, these officers began asking the detainees how and where they bought and sold their supply of heroin. Surprised at this line of questioning, the pro-democracy activists said they knew nothing about heroin and asked why they were being questioned about drugs instead of politics. The interrogators seemed confused by their genuine ignorance of the narcotics trade, the former detainees reported. After consulting with one another, the police admitted they had no idea who the detainees were and were only interrogating them because they had been instructed to do so by Special Branch police. The officers explained they belonged to a specialized narcotics unit, so all they knew how to ask about was drugs. With that established, the detainees said the police and prisoners had a good laugh and shared some snacks, tea, and coffee before they were released the next day unharmed, but slightly amused.

SKIRMISH IN RAKHINE STATE

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¶3. (C) Our contacts in Sittwe, Rakhine State confirmed media reports that a clash broke out between Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) fighters and elements of the Burma Army on the morning of July 21. According to a statement released yesterday by the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), the skirmish took place in Paletwa township in southern Chin State, near Burma's border with India and Bangladesh. We were unable to confirm the ALA statement that its forces killed two Burma Army soldiers in the ambush and suffered no casualties. The Burma Army has not acknowledged or released any information about the clash.

The ALA is the armed wing of the ALP, which has been fighting for Arakanese (aka Rakhine) independence for close to 40 years.

NAW OHN HLA  
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¶4. (C) Opposition lawyer U Aung Thein confirmed media reports that prominent pro-democracy activist Naw Ohn Hla was injured in a Rangoon auto accident on July 21. She has been in Rangoon General Hospital since Monday, but the extent of her injuries were not known. Our sources pointed out that the incident appears to have been a genuine accident, and they did not suspect foul play. Naw Ohn Hla is the leader of the Tuesday Prayer Campaign, a group of pro-democracy activists who, until last Fall, visited Rangoon's Shwe Dagon Pagoda every Tuesday to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners. In October 2007 authorities confined her to her township (neighborhood) for one year

RANGOON 00000594 002 OF 002

(reftel B).

CARTOONS CENSORED  
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¶5. (SBU) Officials from the regime's Cartoon Exhibition Supervisory Committee ordered the removal of four cartoons from an exhibition intended to raise money for cyclone victims. Organizers told the media that five government officials spent two hours inspecting the over 140 cartoons at the charity exhibition before issuing their order. According to the exhibition's organizers, the four cartoons touched on the causes of Cylone Nargis, including one that depicted the cyclone as a consequence of deforestation. One of the cartoonists whose work was displayed told us that although the offending drawings were removed, interested parties can still purchase them from event organizers. None of the artists whose work was censored were arrested.

COMMENT  
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¶6. (C) Than Shwe clearly remains concerned that dissent could spring up at any time. The bizarre arrest and release of the seven NLD members demonstrated the authorities' determination to prevent any protests on Martyr's Day last week. Sending officials from the Orwellian-sounding Cartoon Exhibition Supervisory Committee to censor cyclone-themed cartoons further demonstrates the extent of the regime's paranoia. It would all be quite funny, if it weren't so tragic.

VILLAROSA